

Brookline Preservation Commission
MINUTES OF THE SEPTEMBER 14, 2010 MEETING
School Committee Room (5th floor) Town Hall

Commissioners Present:

James Batchelor, Chair
David King, Vice-chair
Judith Selwyn
Wendy Ecker
Rosemary Battles Foy

Absent:

Bruce Cohen
Elton Elperin
Ashling Fingleton
Gary Gross
Linda Leary
Paul Bell

Staff: Greer Hardwicke, Jean Innamorati

Members of the Public: See list

Mr. Batchelor started the meeting at 6:35 p.m. He appointed Ms. Ecker to vote for Ms. Leary.

Approval of minutes

Mr. King motioned, Ms. Ecker seconded, and the commission voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the July 13, 2010 meeting.

Public comment

Myra Trachtenberg, Town Meeting Member, said that she is concerned by the several demolition cases for houses in the Coolidge Corner neighborhood that the commission has heard recently. Dr. Selwyn said that she shares the concern with the number of recent requests for demolition certificates, not only in Coolidge Corner. She said the commission takes its role in reviewing demolition cases extremely seriously.

PUBLIC HEARING – DEMOLITION

240 Kent Street – *Application to partially demolish house.* Rajinder and Alka Khetarpal, property owners, and Laurence Reeves, the architect representing Mark Coppola, a potential buyer of the property, were present at the hearing. Staff presented a history of the house, built between 1883 and 1884 as a single family house for Orlando Alford and located on a corner lot at the intersection of Kent Street and Newell Road. The building currently is not listed on the National Register of Historic Places but is adjacent to the Longwood National Register District. Two and one-half stories tall, this large high style Queen Anne house has a corner turret, a covered porch, a variety of fenestration and panel brick ornament on its chimneys, among other character-defining features. A carriage house on the large lot was demolished in the 1940s, when the property was owned by Simmons College. The house is one of a few Queen Anne and Shingle style large houses remaining on this side of Kent Street. The initial determination of architectural and historic significance was based on a finding that the location, setting, design, workmanship, materials, feeling and association of the building are intact.

Mr. Reeves said that his client would like to demolish the house and build four housing units on the site. He said that he and his client recognize the historical significance of the building and the neighborhood. He said he previously has worked in historic neighborhoods where he designed neo-Victorian style homes. He also said that he and Mr. Coppola are still reviewing options for the property and that although it might be difficult to create market value using the existing house that it is still a possibility.

Members of the public spoke. Janet Weinberg said that she has lived next door to the house for many years and it would be very hard for her to see it demolished. Heather Falcone, another neighbor, said that

architecture such as this house's was part of the reason she moved to the neighborhood and that she didn't see a need for neo-Victorian buildings in a place where there are real Victorian buildings. Dan Bergman asked why the starting point of discussion was demolition rather than restoration of the building. Neighbor Emiley Lockhart said that she loves the beauty of the neighborhood and its historic homes and said that the psyche of demolition goes against the heart of the neighborhood. Edwin Price said he is opposed to the demolition because it would change the character of the neighborhood. Jan Goodwin said that the house is an anchor of the neighborhood and that the value of the building should be considered to transcend the immediate concerns of both current owners and abutters. She quoted a part of the Brookline Comprehensive plan calling for neighborhood preservation. Mary Dewart pointed to the Children's Hospital project across the street as an example of how preservation can succeed with some changes to a historic building. Megan Dobroth said she recently had renovated a house in the neighborhood and that the effort was well worth the result and that once a historic building is torn down it cannot be replaced.

Mr. Batchelor reviewed the demolition review process and explained that the demolition delay is intended as a time to consider alternatives to demolition. He said the delay period allows owners or buyers of a property to work with other interested parties to try to preserve a building and to come up with ideas about how best to proceed. In some cases the delay allows time to establish a local historic district or find other ways to designate or preserve significant buildings and neighborhoods. Mr. King said that the house at 240 Kent Street is historically significant and that its architectural detail would be difficult and expensive to reproduce. He cited the current restoration of the house at 146 Naples Road as an example to follow. Ms. Ecker said that prominent location of the house was one reason making it difficult to imagine the logic of tearing it down. Ms. Foy said she is struck by the continuity of the scale of the houses along this part of Kent Street and that the neighborhood is made up of large lots with substantially sized single family or multi-family houses that developed near a school. She said that neighbors have made their voice heard and that restoring the building is worth the work that it would entail.

Commissioners encouraged neighbors present to explore the option of designating the area a local historic district and to talk with staff about how to initiate this process.

Dr. Selwyn motioned, Ms. Foy seconded seconded and the commission

VOTED unanimously to uphold the initial determinations of significance for the house and to impose a one year stay of demolition.

19 Hilltop Road – Request to lift stay of demolition. Staff reviewed the finding of significance by the commission on March 9, 2010 for the house built in 1938, designed by John Parkinson and located in the historic All Gas Colony section of Chestnut Hill. Staff presented streetscape drawings and plans for the proposed work at 29 Hilltop Road, next door to 19 Hilltop Road and also owned by the applicant.

Polly Ross Ribatt, property owner, explained that plans to add an addition to 29 Hilltop Road recently were approved by the planning and appeals boards. She said that initially there were plans to occupy the house at 19 Hilltop Road while the work next door was in progress but that the current condition of the house made it unfit for habitation. Mr. Ribatt respectfully requested the commission to consider lifting the stay of demolition so that the construction time-line for work at 29 Hilltop Road could be expedited. She presented documentation of mold and other conditions preventing habitable use of the house. Ms. Ribatt said that her family has lived in the neighborhood for eleven years and that she had met with her neighbors, many of whom had expressed approval of the plans to add an addition to 29 Hilltop Road.

Neighbor Nicholas Lynch said that his family once owned the property. He said he believed the proposed work would affect the historic character of the area adversely and asked that the stay not be lifted. He

expressed concern with the ground conditions and said he understood that there is considerable bedrock under the site that may require substantial work to be removed. Staff read letters from Diane Schodlatz and Gay Schueler, who both requested the commission not to lift the stay of demolition.

Commissioners discussed the request. Dr. Selwyn asked for clarification about how the proposed construction was approved. She said it was her impression that a double lot would not exist legally until the house on one of the lots was demolished. Mr. King said that his concern is that the scale of the proposed addition would be out of character with other houses on the street. Ms. Foy said that the pitch of the roof of the proposed barn addition appeared to be different from the slope of the roof of the existing house. Commissioners said that it was difficult to understand the scale and massing of the proposed addition from the drawings submitted.

Mr. King motioned, Dr. Selwyn seconded and the commission

VOTED unanimously to continue the one year stay of demolition for the house at 19 Hilltop Road.

PUBLIC HEARINGS – LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICTS

76 Walnut Place – *Continuation of an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness to extend north (front) two story projection out 8 feet and rebuild front stairs; to construct new set of stairs with railings and new front entry; to construct one story addition on east (side) and south (rear) elevations, approx. 10 x 20 feet; to remove existing south porch section and replace with two story arched portico to match opposite side; to construct a raised deck and pergola connected to new one story addition; to construct a new two car garage in front of house and connect to main house with pergola; to remove existing chain link fence and replace with stockade fence up to 6 feet high and approx. 85 feet in length along east (side) property line.* Peter & Sara Fleiss, applicants, Robert Brannen, architect, and Robert Allen, attorney, were present at the hearing.

Mr. Allen presented a visibility study that the commission had requested at the commission meeting in August. Staff presented the additional elevations of the proposed detached garage and walk-way fence also requested at the last hearing and a new proposed design of the fence. Based on the study, Mr. Allen said that very little of the proposed garage, walkway and fence would be visible from Upland Road and that the work proposed at the rear elevation of the existing house would not be visible from High Street.

Dennis De Witt, an abutter of an abutter of the property, said he attended a meeting of neighbors held by the new owners and that he considered their presentation to be fairly thorough. He said in general he thinks the project is a good one overall but that there may be additional visibility of the proposed work from Walnut Place. Kitty Ames, an abutter, said that she was also at the neighborhood meeting and appreciated the new owners desire to expand the kitchen and make it accessible to the back yard by means of a walkway and raised deck. Lavinia Clay, an abutter of the property, said that she had met recently with the owners. She said her concern is with the proposed raised pergola and the height of the proposed fence along her property line. The plans show the fence to be six-feet high and she would like to recommend at lower height.

Mr. Brannen said that based on neighbor's concerns the fence proposed would be solid board with open board along the top one foot. He said it would have a minimum height of four feet, a maximum height of six feet and would be stepped down as the grade lowers along the property line.

After discussion, Mr. King motioned, Ms. Ecker seconded and the commission

VOTED unanimously to approve the application with staff approval of final details of the garage and fence.

Documents reviewed by the commission: 76 Walnut Place: Visibility study, elevation drawings of proposed alterations/additions and site plan revised September 9, 2010.

87 Walnut Street - *Application for an amended Certificate of Appropriateness to install one wood window on basement story of north (rear) elevation of house.* Angela Ward Hyatt, applicant, was present at the hearing. Ms. Hyatt said that the window proposed to be installed was found in the basement and that it appears to be a window located on a basement wall that was an exterior wall before the garage addition was built. The commission approved alterations to the garage and rear deck at the September 2009 meeting

After discussion, Dr. Selwyn motioned, Mr. King seconded and the commission

VOTED unanimously to approve the installation of an original window at the basement level as proposed.

Documents reviewed by the commission: 87 Walnut Street: north elevation construction drawing and and basement level construction plan dated August 18, 2010.

61 Spooner Road - *Application for a Certificate of Appropriateness to remove attached greenhouse from north (side) elevation of house and to demolish detached two-car garage.* Michael Whitmore, architect, was present at the hearing. The house, designed by Chapman and Frazer, was built in 1913 for original owner George Sherman. Staff explained that there are two detached garages on the property: the wood-frame garage is contemporary with the house and also designed by Chapman and Frazer; another metal two-car garage was built adjacent to the first one in 1931 and later added on to the back wall. The greenhouse addition to the main house appears to date to the mid-20th century.

Mr. Whitmore said that the metal garage proposed to be removed has deteriorated substantially and that two large trees close by it have destroyed the foundation. He said that the owners would make salvageable parts of the metal garage available for reuse, but that the doors in particular were in very poor condition. Mr. Whitmore said that when the greenhouse addition was added to the house that a set of French doors were removed and stored in the basement. He said that these doors have been restored and were proposed to be installed in their original location together with a wood and glazed storm panel.

Dr. Selwyn said that she considers the existence of the two garages side-by-side on the property to be rather odd and that the older of the two adds charm and character to the property while the metal garage detracts from it. The greenhouse is also not original to the house and detracts from the porch

and the lines of the side elevation of the house. She said that there are many extant examples of metal garages and therefore would be willing to vote in favor of the proposal. Ms. Foy said that she agreed and that the greenhouse detracts from the original presentation of the house. She said that although in some cases additions such as these show how buildings change over time and have historical significance in their own right, that their proposed removal in this case would be appropriate to the character of the house and the neighborhood.

After discussion, Mr. King motioned, Dr. Selwyn seconded and the commission

VOTED unanimously to approve the application, as submitted, to remove the attached metal garage and the attached greenhouse.

Documents reviewed by the commission: 60 Spooner Road: photographs received August 27, 2010.

UPDATES, REPORTS AND NEW BUSINESS

Carlton Street Footbridge – Review & discussion of 25% plan for submission to Massachusetts Department of Transportation. William Smith of the Engineering Department and Andre Martecchini of SEA Consulting presented a materials board for both the historic bridge and the ramps. Mr. Smith said that his department was growing closer to submission of the 25% plan to the state Department of Transportation. He said that the plan calls for the footbridge to be raised 15 inches above its present height to a new height above the rail line of 15 feet 6 inches. On the park side he said that the plan entails adding ramps on both sides and that on the park side the ground grade will be raised approximately 5% to restore the ground to where it was when the bridge was built. He presented the materials and configuration of the proposed screening and rail system and a protective missile barrier. Mr. Smith said that a consultant would be analyzing paint chip samples as a way to understand the historic paint treatment.

Commissioners discussed the materials and configuration. They suggested ways to differentiate the historic structure from the new ramps by using differing scales of the same material versus using differing materials. Glass as opposed to mesh was suggested as a possible material as fill below the new rails. The posts of the ramp rails were suggested to be perpendicular to the ground rather than offset. The structure of the missile barrier was suggested to be flush with the outside of the rails or centered atop the rails.

83 Penniman Place - Review & recommendation of proposed amendment to Preservation Restriction. Stephen and Helen Crosby, property owners, and Steven Small, attorney, requested the commission to support an amended and restated preservation restriction to reflect the condition of the property after the complete loss of the historic house in a fire in December 2008.

Ms. Hardwicke explained that staff and Town Counsel had been in contact with the property owners, their legal counsel and representatives of the Trust for Architectural Easements since the August commission meeting. She said that the Trust had forwarded drawings of a proposed house to be built on the site and had requested staff to comment on the proposal. She said that the proposal was to build a house in the spirit of the one that was lost by employing forms, massing and, for the most part, materials that were similar to those of the historic house. She said that staff expressed some concerns with the rhythm of the fenestration pattern on the front elevation, with

details of the porch design on one side and with the lack of a clear elevation drawing for the other side of the proposed house. She said that because the proposed new house is not located in a local historic district that the proposed aluminum-clad windows would be appropriate, though not the preferred material.

Mr. Small said that the property owners would have preferred extinguishment of the easement but that it likely it would be a long and uncertain process since there are few if any legal precedents. He said that the proposed amendment and restatement of the easement would allow a potential buyer of the property to construct a new house that would not replicate the house that was lost but would add to the quality of the neighborhood and the streetscape.

After discussion, Mr. King motioned, Ms. Ecker seconded and the commission

Voted unanimously to write a memorandum to the Board of Selectmen to the effect that the commission requests that it be removed from an amended and restated preservation restriction on the property at 83 Penniman Place and that the commission supports adoption of an amended and restated preservation restriction because it appears to be in the public interest.

Discussion and vote of NR/CLG opinions for community-wide 20th century architectural survey.

Ms. Hardwicke reviewed the properties surveyed in the recently completed second part of the community-wide 20th century study conducted by consultant Kathleen Broomer, as well as the property at 143 Saint Paul Street. Commissioners discussed the buildings and recommended that staff issue National Register/Certified Local Government opinions for 143 Saint Paul Street, and for the properties in the Glenoe and Pine Roads Area and the Arlington-Beresford-Kensington Area.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 p. m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jean Innamorati
Secretary of the commission